



BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Maximum Custody – Not “Isolation” or “Solitary Confinement”

BACKGROUND: As of December 31, 2014, there were 2,650 inmates classified as maximum custody, or 6.3% of the inmate population. The Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) has been criticized for placing inmates in maximum custody, which is referred to by critics as “isolation” or “solitary confinement,” who claim detrimental effects on inmates, particularly those with mental health issues. This criticism is largely due to a lack of understanding that maximum custody is not synonymous with isolation and solitary confinement, which are associated with a complete deprivation of human contact and external interaction or stimulation.

- **Maximum Custody** – Maximum custody housing is used for inmates who pose the greatest risk to the safety and security of the public, as well as other inmates and staff.
 - About 76% have been sentenced to violent crimes, such as murder, kidnapping, robbery, and assault.
 - About 24% consist of drug offenses, theft and burglary.
 - Average length of sentence is 15.0 years.
 - About 37% have Security Threat Group (prison gang) affiliations.
 - History of institutional violence: 3.7 violent disciplines per every 1 inmate.
 - May have been placed in maximum custody due to commission of one of the following “Forbidden Three” acts during incarceration: serious assault on staff, serious inmate on inmate assault with a weapon, and multiple inmates assaulting an inmate with serious injury.
- **Maximum Custody Housing and Programs** – Despite the misconception that maximum custody is equivalent to isolation and solitary confinement, this custody level provides diverse opportunities for one-on-one and group interaction.
 - 29% of maximum custody beds are double-bunked.
 - Cells have windows for visibility and communication with staff and other inmates.
 - There are opportunities for group contact, activities, recreation, and work.

ADC PLAN OF ACTION: ADC recently implemented DI 326, *Maximum Custody Population Management*, to facilitate a standardized process for maximum custody inmates to work through a step program. Based on behavior and program participation, inmates may progress from control-based housing to open-privilege-based housing, where movement outside a cell is without restraint equipment. The process provides inmates with the opportunity to participate in jobs, programs and other out of cell activities. Incentives at each step include incremental increases in privileges such as store purchases, phone calls, visitation, library services, television, and personal property. In some cases, inmates may progress out of maximum custody to a lower security level.



Arizona Department of Corrections

Maximum Custody



Maximum Custody Group Recreation

